

Transcribed by Janet Taylor, June 2001

My informant's name is Velma Perry. She is seventy-five. The interview will be held at her house. Today is March 31, 1987. The subject that will be discussed is medicine. My name is Maria VanLeuven, I am a student at Lapoint Elementary. This will be part of an oral history project.

Maria VanLeuven (MV): How is medicine different from back when you were a child, than it is now?

Velma Perry (Velma): Well, back when I was a child, most of the medicines that we had were prescriptions or was given to us by our mother or our grandmother. We didn't go to doctors very much, hardly ever. But we went to the doctor. Maybe if you were really sick, why, a mid-wife was called in, or else a neighbor was called in to help. Once in a while, like when I had pneumonia when I was about your size, my folks called the doctor from Vernal and he came over and checked me out. The doctor sometimes came to your home, but you didn't go to them hardly ever. They were what we called, well, they came to your home. He gave me a prescription.

MV: How had medicine made you feel better faster? Or, does medicine make you feel better faster now?

Velma: I don't think so.

MV: Just about the same?

Velma: Probably about the same thing, you know. We believed in what our mothers were doing, and quite a lot of what they gave us was spearmint tea, or something like that, and we believed they knew what they were doing, so we thought we were getting better, anyhow. So, I don't think it makes us feel well any quicker than it used to.

It did take a longer time. Now, like if you had pneumonia. I had pneumonia two or three times. If you had pneumonia, it was a lot harder and longer fight than it is now with the modern medicine, because you can cure it in two or three days and it used to take about ten or twelve, so in that way it is faster.

MV: Is there more medicine now than back then?

Velma: Yes, a lot more, all kinds of medicines we hear of nowadays. Prescriptions in the hundreds. Oh, there is a lot more of it than there was then, that I knew of.

MV: What kind of medicines were common in the house?

Velma: Most mothers, mine did too, used castor oil for laxatives and different things that we used for warts, and blemishes on your hands. And then they used Epsom salts also for a laxative, to

clean you out, and then when you had a fever and were quite sick, why, they had a little tiny, white pill that they called a “Calimol” tablet. They were really sort of dangerous, but our mothers used to give that to us on their own wisdom. It wouldn’t be coming from the doctor. You could go to the drugstore and buy it and it was really a common medicine. A little tiny white pill. But that’s the little tiny white pill that went in the stomach of Joseph Smith and Hyrum Smith and killed him.

MV: Why was it dangerous?

Velma: For one thing, it would not dissolve in the intestines. It would lay there, and that’s what happened to Hyrum Smith. It would just lay there, and he got a gangrene and that’s what killed him. Just put poisons in the body. And then the medicine itself, I guess, was really strong on the body. I don’t know for sure what was the matter, but I know that was the thing that they said killed Hyrum Smith. Hyrum Smith told his mother and the doctor, “If I take it, I’ll die.” And it laid in his intestines and caused gangrene and he did die.

But that was handled through the drugstores and the doctors prescribed it if you had seen the doctor, and they thought it was a good medicine. I’ve taken a lot of it. I mean, I’ve taken some of it and got by, and other people did, but there was once in a while somebody died of it.

Then my mother used to give us sagebrush every spring. She’d go out and gather sagebrush and steep it for a little while, and then we’d drink maybe a tablespoon of that every morning before we went to school. And that was in the spring, and that was to purify your blood, because they always believed that you accumulated a lot of toxins and poisons through the winter. And this would clean up the blood and purify it, and make your blood nice and ready to go for summer, and it did. That did. It was a good medicine.

Then if you had upset stomachs or a burn on your hand, they’d steep green tea. The leaves from green tea and the liquid from green tea will help a burn on your hand. It really does. Or else wherever you get burned. And then, tame-sage was used in those days to take worms out of children. And it’s also a blood medicine. It’ll purify the blood and heal it up. It is a very good medicine. Tame-sage that you grow in the garden.

Then, they used to sell at the drugstore a little cake that was about three inches by two and a half square, I imagine, and that was called magnesia. Now they give milk of magnesia and that. But this was when our bones got bad, why a mother would buy that and you’d just bite it off. It was a little dry, like chalky stuff, but I always did like it. You could eat some of that. Mothers used it when they were pregnant. Before they had a baby, the doctors would recommend it. And then we used Brigham tea. That’s what Brigham Young used when he came across the plains, and that was also a good blood builder and it was a good body builder. It would clean up infections and would even clean up cancer sores and heal them up. I’ve heard of people that I know.

Then there were mothers, like Grandma Perry, that went to the extreme, and a lot of them like her did, if you had a sore throat, they’d rub carlyle on your throat. Grandma has even put carlyle in her kids’ ears when they had earache, and burned their eardrums out. The doctor told Marvin his eardrums had been completely burned out. Once in a while she’d put just a little drop of carlyle in our ear. Boy, it’d stop the pain, but it’d bring on another one. So, that was some things they used.

MV: Describe the taste of the medicines.

Velma: Well, it was icky, except the herbs, they were never icky. But medicine, you know, castor oil and Epsom salts, were very icky. Nasty. But they're icky nowadays, too. But then, the tea, the herb teas, were never bad to take. Even I didn't think sagebrush was too bad. You can learn to take sagebrush and it's quite refreshing just to take a spoonful every day. It will cure cancer leukemia. I know a man that cleared up his leukemia with that, and Vera Lee ? that used to live here, her blood got so low that her ears, you could see almost through her ears. Her husband told her to go out and get some sagebrush and steep it and drink it and it would build her blood up, and she did. She went back to the doctor in two weeks and he couldn't believe it. He said her blood was right up. She had color in her ears, and color in her lips, and color in her face, and built her blood up in two weeks. So, sagebrush is a fantastic – and besides, it was an antiseptic. If you had canker sores or sores in your mouth, you could rinse your mouth and it would heal it up. It's sort of strong, but it was kind of good. It was a good medicine.

MV: Where did your mother keep all of the medicine?

Velma: We did used to have a drugstore up here in Lapoint. Most of the medicines I'd get, some of the medicines came from there. But my folks would go to Roosevelt or Vernal, oh, maybe, well, just when they needed to that bad. It wouldn't be maybe only once in two or three months or something, because they had to go in a wagon, and so, some of the medicines were brought home from there, from the drugstore. And then, of course, when you think about sage tea and sagebrush, and things like that, you can just go out in the garden or in the field or somewhere else and pick them up. There were other herbs that were used. I can't think of them just now, but these you just raised and grew right around you. Brigham tea was right around us.

MV: Did the medicine bottles have safety lids so that kids couldn't open them? Little kids?

Velma: No. They didn't have any safety caps. The safety caps have only been in the later years. Most of the medicines that we got in those days, like aspirins or prescriptions or such, would just come in little, tiny pasteboard boxes. Or they were in just a little tiny – like an envelope or something like that. No, they didn't even come in bottles, unless it was a liquid. If it was a dry medicine then it came in a little, tiny box. Usually my mother just put them high up in the cupboard. We never had a medicine cabinet. I can't remember, but we never did have. I never did have a medicine cabinet after I got my children, either. We never kept them under lock and key.

MV: Were children ill with the same problems that we have now?

Velma: Yes and no. We have a lot of the same childhood diseases now that we used to have then, but there have been some that have been practically stamped out. One of them is smallpox. Smallpox used to come along and kill up to twenty people in a town, and diphtheria would come along, it would kill. My mother's little sister died of diphtheria when she was five years old, and my mother said that every family in Fairview lost one or two children with that siege of diphtheria. And that you hardly ever hear about any more. You hardly ever hear about smallpox any more.

They've stamped polio out, practically. For years and years that was wiping people out. It was a deadly disease. And we have sieges now of whooping cough, but not like it used to be. Whooping cough used to come through the school and every kid that hadn't had it would have it. And if adults had grown up without getting it, then they would get it. So that one is not quite as bad as it used to be.

A lot of people died in those days with tuberculosis. We rarely ever hear about a case of tuberculosis any more. They've learned how to be more sanitary and more careful, we have a better diet, so those things, with modern cleanliness and I guess immunizations and things, they are a lot less than they were then. But then, we have new diseases now, that we didn't hear of then. One of them is herpes. That's a venereal disease. And then this one that we're hearing about – AIDS, now. Then we have cancer that we didn't hear very often about, then. So there's quite a few diseases that are different and new now, that we never knew about when I was a kid.

MV: Was there drug abuse then?

Velma: Not that I know of. Not that I know of. There might have been some cases in the city, but I don't think we ever had a case of that in the country. Years later, when doctors got to prescribing pain pills and things for people, they came into the idea that everybody that had a tension had to have a pill, and the doctors got to prescribing for mothers who said they were too nervous, and hypertensive children, and so on like that, and it went right overboard and it's still in action.

Our doctors have prescribed and prescribed and prescribed until they have made drug addicted people out of our mothers and out of our children, and we have a drug addicted society, besides all else that the teenagers and that go out and produce on themselves. So, I never heard of drug abuse in my life when I was growing up. Even after I was married – hardly ever, you heard of it. Then all of a sudden, it came in, and mostly from prescriptions is where I first heard of it. You take people and they fill a prescription, and they think, "Why, that helped me so much, I'll go back and get another, then another, and another." Finally they're addicted and don't know it.

MV: How do you feel about how people treat and act about taking drugs now?

Velma: I think it's terrible. It's a public nuisance. I think it is absolutely terrible the way people are throwing away their lives with drug abuse. Deteriorating their brains, deteriorating their bodies. They're passing crippled conditions on to their children, and they're making a weak species of human beings. And there's a lot of crime and sickness and murders, and everything, because when we're abusing our minds, we don't think right and we go out and murder and cause a lot of crime. So, I think it is terrible. That's what I think about it.

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